



## **FY13 Accomplishment Report**

### **Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument**

2013 was an exciting year for the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument (MSHNVN) on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The dedicated staff worked tirelessly finding creative and innovative ways to breathe new life into the Monument. Specifically focusing efforts on goals set forth in the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP), the Monument has strengthened relationships with non-profit partners and volunteers (garnering over 35,000 volunteer hours), made significant capital investments, identified projects to increase access, created new partnerships with the local community, and increased program offerings. One major highlight in FY13 was the substantial progress made towards repurposing the Science and Learning Center at Coldwater. The following report highlights the many significant accomplishments made this past year.

### **Johnston Ridge Observatory and the Science and Learning Center at Coldwater:**

**Music on the Mountain:** Now in its second year, this three part concert series presents popular regional bands with Mount St. Helens as a stunning backdrop. Organized in partnership with the Cowlitz County Economic Development Council (EDC), the concerts were held on Saturday evenings throughout the summer at the Johnston Ridge Observatory (JRO)



An audience of over 300 people listening to a band at the Music on the Mountain Series.

amphitheater. This year the partnership support was

expanded to include volunteers from Kelso Rotary, who helped with crowd control, band set up, and alcohol sales (totaling 224 volunteer hours). The club raised about \$1000 for their group through those sales and is committed to assisting with the concert series in the future. The EDC secured \$9,000 in sponsorships from local businesses to cover all expenses. Each concert was standing room only.



for the greatest good

**Interpretation Awards:** In 2011, JRO unveiled the Return to Life touch screen exhibit and two interpretive movies: “Mount St. Helens a Living Laboratory” and “Mount St. Helens Eruption of Life.” In 2013, the touch screen kiosk was awarded a first place prize by the National Association for Interpretation and the two movies were awarded second and third prizes respectively. In addition, Silver Telly awards, given for excellence in local, regional, and cable television commercials, were awarded to both movies.



Child using the new touch screen exhibit at JRO.

## Science and Learning Center (SLC) at Coldwater:

### Granger Thy Agreement for

**SLC:** A big leap towards our goal of repurposing the Coldwater Ridge facility as the Science and Learning Center at Coldwater was finding a tool that allows a partner to play a meaningful role in operation of the center. In 2013, the Mount St. Helens Institute was awarded a Granger Thy permit that hands them significant responsibility for operations and maintenance of the facility while giving them the opportunity to invest in the building. Through this partnership, the Institute has hosted close to 30 educational groups utilizing the facility and helped serve nearly 11,000 general visitors over the summer months.



Science and Learning Center at Coldwater



**Arts and Vines Art Exhibition:** In its second year, the Arts and Vines art exhibit showcases local art and artists at various locations in the greater Castle Rock, WA area. This year, the Science and Learning at Coldwater participated in the event and hosted art from eight different local artists. Over 450 people attended the two day event. Expanding the facilities traditional use allows the Monument to bring in a new set of visitors and re-engage local residents.

**Campground Preliminary Project Analysis (PPA):** In 2013, the Monument began a NEPA process on the proposed development of two campgrounds associated with the SLC. The campgrounds would host both educational groups and individuals and families participating in SLC programs, and provide the overnight capacity necessary to make the SLC a success. The environmental assessment will go out for public comment in January of 2014.

## **Climbing and Trails:**

**Trails and Climbing Work:** The climbing and trails crew constructed one mile of trail and maintained 90 more. Two large trees covering a trail were blasted out for public safety and over 75 trees were removed from across the Lava Canyon Trail. Over 18,527 climbing permits were issued, an increase of over 4,000 from last year, and 200 Mount Margaret Back Country permits were issued. Climbing staff interacted with over 7,000 climbers, providing on the trail education regarding safe climbing practices, weather information, and Leave No Trace principles



Trail Crew member removing a fallen tree along Fossil Creek trail.

**Partnerships:** Partnerships played an instrumental role in the trails program in 2013. The Washington Trails Association, the Mount St. Helens Institute, the Northwest Trail Alliance, the Evergreen Mountain Bike club, and the American Hiking Society volunteered over 1,600 hours. The partnerships helping make much of this work possible continue to grow as partners become increasingly committed to contributing to the trails program at Mount St. Helens. Highlights from 2013 include the new Ape Cave Viewpoint Trail, a one mile trail leading from the popular Ape Cave Day Use Site up to a newly opened viewpoint of the mountain. This trail was designed and constructed almost entirely with volunteer people-power. Another highlight





was the highly attended Lakes Trail work party, organized by very energetic and well-connected mountain bikers and attended by about 70 of their peers.

**Hummocks Trail App:** After over a year in development, we are nearly ready to launch a new app, created in partnership with Get To Know, a Canadian organization. The app covers a popular interpretive trail that exposes visitors to many aspects of the volcanic landscape. Designed for middle and high school age youth, users will walk the trail with app in hand, answering biology and geology challenges along the way. In Spring 2014, a group of students will beta test the app, providing their feedback to developers.



Screen shot of the new Hummocks Trail App.

**Crater View Climb:** In response to Advisory Committee recommendations suggesting access to the Monument be expanded, Mount St. Helens conducted NEPA analysis (decision expected Spring 2014) on a new route to a spectacular crater overlook on the north side of the mountain. Starting from Windy Ridge (or Johnston Ridge for heartier souls), the



NEPA Team Member looking into the crater along the North Side Climbing route.

route follows existing trails to a point below Loowit Falls. From there, the route climbs up the north flank of the mountain to a high ridge directly in front of the gaping crater. While the future goal is for this route to be open to the public and part of the climbing permit system, in 2013 the route was piloted as a guided opportunity by the Mount St. Helens Institute, which led clients on Crater View excursions throughout the summer. Media and climbers have raved about the experience.



## Community Engagement:

### Volcano Naturalist

**Program:** In 2013, the Monument, in partnership with the Mount St. Helens Institute and numerous scientists from around the region, launched the Volcano Naturalist Program (VNP). The VNP is modeled on Master Gardener and Master Naturalist programs around the country. The primary objective is to develop a corps of highly trained volunteers committed to



Graduates of the Volcano Naturalist program.

volunteering 60 hours of training in exchange for 60 hours of training. The first class was composed of 28 volunteers ranging from high school age to seniors. After two and a half months of classes and field trips, these volunteers spent the summer at interpretive sites and along trails educating and serving the public.

**New Website:** Working with the Mount St. Helens Institute, the monument secured corporate sponsorship from Second Story Interactive Studios and Gravitare to produce an educational website for the Mount St. Helens Science and Learning Center: [www.mshslc.org](http://www.mshslc.org). The website launched in May, 2013 and is currently receiving 2,000 to 8,000 unique visits (9,000 to 15,000 page views) per month.



New website for the Science and Learning Center at Coldwater.





## Volcanic 50:

For some marathoners, 26.2 miles just isn't enough. To provide these hearty souls a unique place to test their skills and endurance, the Monument hosted the Volcanic 50. Now in its second year, this 50 mile race circles Mount St. Helens along the Loowit Trail starting and finishing at Marble Mountain Sno Park. Over 115 people participated in the grueling event. The race was lauded by participants as a huge success and plans are already being made to host this event next year.



Starting point of the Volcanic 50 at Marble Mountain Sno Park.

**EDC Partnership:** The Monument's close partnership with the Cowlitz County Economic Development Council (EDC) continued and expanded in 2013. The EDC acts as a liaison between the local business community and the Monument. Through many speaking engagements and newspaper columns in 2013, the EDC highlighted the goals, objectives, and planning efforts underway for the Monument describing how these goals and projects can be mutually beneficial to the Monument and surrounding communities. The EDC has been very successful in garnering new local support and finding volunteers and other partners to help the Monument expand education and recreation opportunities.

**Outreach Events:** A key component of engaging the public is bringing the science and technology of the Monument to them. This year, Monument staff, in partnership with the Mount St. Helens Institute and the Student Conservation Association participated in 40 community events reaching over 1,600 people. Highlights include two science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) events at the Clark County Community College and a local winery with over 130 people in total attendance.

**Outfitters and Guides:** One way to expand access to Mount St. Helens is to provide the public with opportunities to explore the Monument with the help of an outfitter or guide. While the forest has had a moratorium on awarding new priority special use permits for many years, in 2012 and 2013 Mount St. Helens awarded temporary special use permits to outfitter-guides offering new services on Coldwater Lake. We see many opportunities to provide expanded access to the public in otherwise closed parts of the Monument by taking advantage of the services outfitters and guides can provide, particularly leave-no-trace education and resource impact mitigation. In 2013, Monument staff worked with a Forest Service Enterprise Team



conducting a forest-wide outfitter and guide needs assessment, which will offer a recommended allocation for areas around Mount St. Helens appropriate for outfitter and guide use. Our hope is that once complete (spring 2014), the door will be open for the Monument to award some new priority special use permits opening up new and unique parts of the Monument to the public.

**Children's Forest Grant:** MSHNVM secured a \$69,600 Forest Service grant to support youth education and wellness programs around Mount St. Helens. The majority of the grant will be implemented on the Monument by the Mount St. Helens Institute and will allow them to expand and sustain Monument-based STEM programs to youth around the region. These programs will engage more children in ecological research, citizen science, environmental stewardship, and outdoor recreation. Programs will include multi-day educational adventures, field-based research, career development opportunities, and more.

### **Engineering:**

**JRO Trail and Walkway Improvement:** The popular JRO walkway was in dire need of maintenance due to the ever-shifting and compacting pumice the trail sits on. National Priority List (NPL) funds are allowing the reconstruction of the asphalt trail, installation of precast concrete benches, and the installation of pedestrian control devices at the main walkway entrance to JRO. This project will increase public safety and provide for a better recreation experience for visitors.

### **Pine Creek Electrical and Water System**

**Upgrade:** The historic Pine Creek facility on the south side of the Monument once served as a Ranger Station in the early and mid-1900's. The facility now serves as an important information center, housing unit, and forward staging area for operations on the south and east side of the Monument. NPL funds are permitting upgrades to the electrical and water systems, allowing this important facility to continue its role as customer interface and south side employee bunkhouse and staging area.



Walking path at Johnston Ridge Observatory.



## Cascades Peaks Building

**Replacement:** The Cascades Peaks facility once served as the main point of contact for visitors along the FS 99 corridor. Due to maintenance concerns, the facility was shut down in 2011. NPL funds are allowing the Monument to construct a new building at the Cascades Peaks site, which will be staffed in large part by volunteers and partners. Plans are also in development for this facility to serve as the check-in area for north side crater climbers.



Concept drawing of new building to be constructed at Cascades Peaks.

**Fossil Trail Bridge:** Working in close partnership with the Back Country Horsemen, the Fossil Trail bridge project is a prime example of public, private, and non-profit cooperation. Design plans for the bridge were done by Forest Service personnel, a local manufacturer is building the bridge, and the Back Country Horsemen are helping to install it. This bridge will allow for increased access and decreased riparian damage along a popular trail.



Excavation work being done in preparation for Fossil Trail Bridge.

